



Middle Fork Boater News – 2012 Summary

As the boating community watches the snowpack levels and prepares their application(s) for the river lotteries, here's a look back at 2012 and some early news for 2013.

March and April doings

Some anxious boaters got a jump on the float season, with the first group launching from Thomas Creek on March 23rd.

Boaters returning from a March 31 float trip reported arriving just after an avalanche blocked the Middle Fork (photo - right). The slide was in the vicinity of Pungo Creek, between Indian Creek and Little Soldier Camp, and came in on river right. The river quickly carved through the snow, but a lot of wood was dumped into the river system.



Marsh Creek

The first boaters to report conditions after their April 10 float trip stated that Marsh Creek was still snowed in, and they had to portage 4 or 5 snow bridges with 5-6 ft. of snow. Also, there were two very hazardous snags on blind corners.

Trees were somewhat of a “here one week, gone the next” issue on Marsh Creek all spring.

The fish trap was moved to the side by the Idaho Fish & Game to allow for easier boater passage until the road to Boundary Creek opened.

Pistol Creek Rapid hazard

Folks at Pistol Creek Ranch advised us of a tree in Pistol Creek Rapid on April 29th. The tree washed out in a later surge.

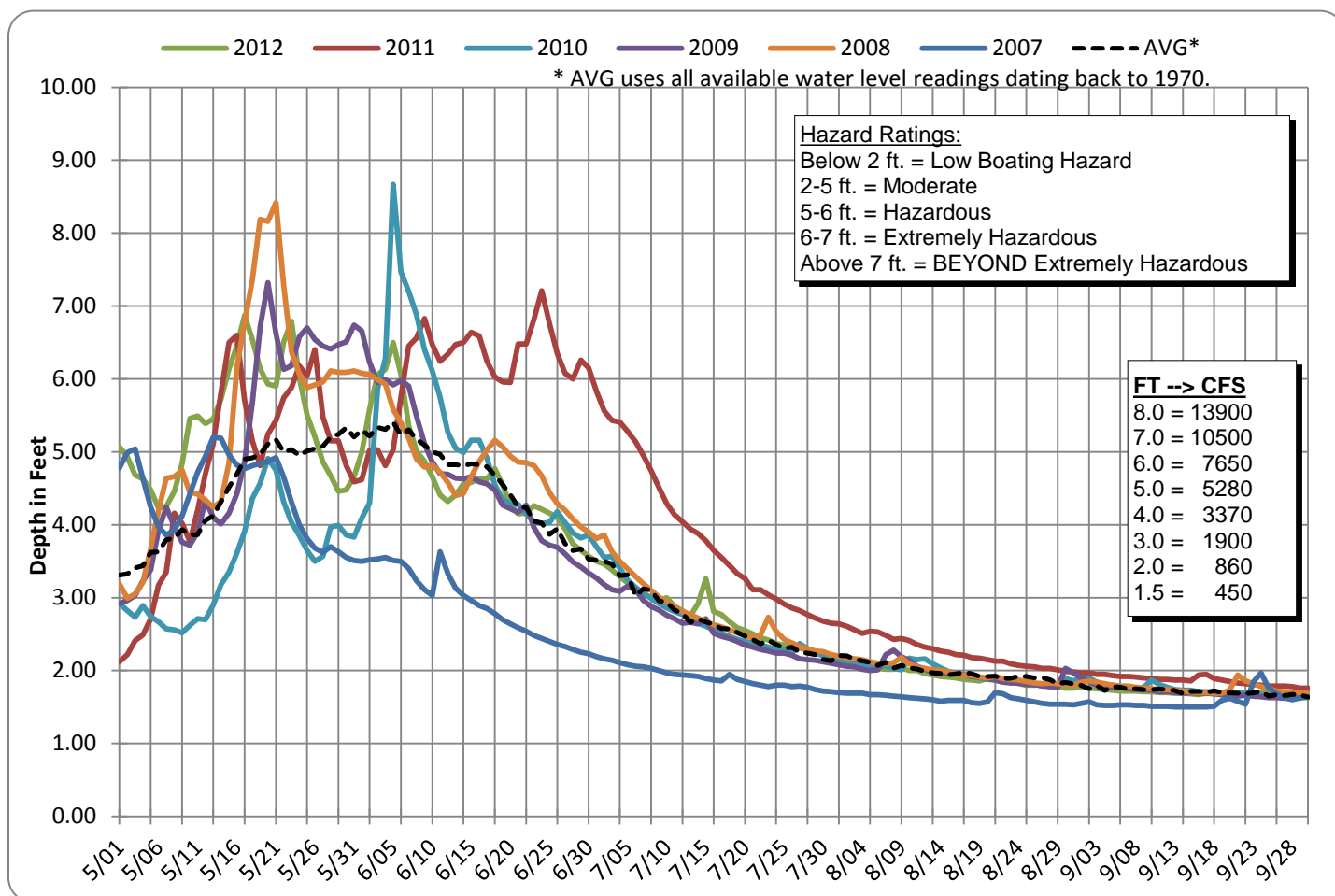


Early warm temps; high water levels

The Middle Fork of the Salmon River was recorded at 7.65 feet (12,600 cfs) on Friday, April 27th, the highest peak ever recorded before mid-May at Middle Fork Lodge. At the mouth of the Middle Fork, the gauge read 43 feet and 22,300 cfs for this date.

Two other peaks were recorded this year, reaching 6.79 feet on May 23rd, dropping to 4.46 on May 29th, then climbing back up to 6.5 feet on June 5th. The river didn't drop below 4 feet until June 27th.

Snow was late in arriving, with February 1st showing 81% of the 30-year average for snow, March 1st only 79% of average, and April 1st listing 102% of average for snow.



Guard Stations open

Indian Creek Guard Station opened on May 8th this year. The road to Boundary Creek was shoveled open on May 24th, and the guard station was opened on May 29th.

AIS Inspections

Craft inspections were conducted at Boundary Creek and Indian Creek Guard Stations throughout the year. Only three inspections resulted in the need to have boats cleaned and scrubbed before allowed them to enter the river.

Indian Creek trees, ramp

Forest Service personnel dropped hazard trees in the Indian Creek Beach camping area and in the surrounding administrative site. Some were set aside for use in the new ramp (left).

Prior to tearing out the ramp in September, the Indian Creek Guard and the American Indian Interpreter cleared and widened an old access ramp (right) to facilitate hauling gear to the beach from the airstrip.



Conflicts, Injuries and a Fatality

There were sad and unpleasant incidents this season:

A fatality occurred on the Middle Fork at Velvet Falls on June 3rd. Improper gear and lack of conditioning were contributing factors in this incident.

Medical evacuations and/or injuries that were reported: a badly broken foot; an individual with chest pain, a wrist injury, an ankle sprain, a rattlesnake bite.

In early June, a river camp was “poached” by a private group that refused to move out of another private group’s camp; a citation (ticket) was issued and paid by the offending party.

A group of private boaters were seen using soap in Sunflower Hot Springs.

A group of campers took a reserved site at the Boundary Creek Campground and refused to leave; citations issued and paid.

On the flip side, there were many occasions of boaters (commercial and private) assisting one another and helping keep the river corridor clean. Many of the early spring and late fall boaters helped clean up some of the messy camps left by others (boaters, hikers, stock users and pilots). Others reported hazards and concerns to be shared with the boating community. When fire blocked the Salmon River Road, the majority of folks banded together and shared food and company until the road reopened. We appreciate greatly boaters helping us out and each other.

Our thanks to those private and commercial boaters who helped us and each other enjoy this wonderful river.

Diana Yupe provided interpretive talks at Indian Creek

Diana Yupe, archaeologist and American Indian Interpreter for the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, again provided interpretive services to the boating public on the importance of cultural and natural resource protection and the history of American Indians of the area.



Visitors hearing Diana's preservation message learn the importance that the Middle Fork holds for the Tribes, what boaters can do to preserve heritage resources during their visit to this special place, and the role of the Tribes to help ensure the continued survival of native fisheries.

Fires affect roads and air quality

Fires started burning in late July, and boaters had to deal with smoke and access difficulties from the Halstead, Banner and Mustang fires. The Halstead Fire affected traffic on Highway 75 at times, the Banner Fire affected Highway 21, and the Mustang Complex affected the Salmon River Road and Highway 93. In addition, flights were occasionally delayed into the backcountry by heavy smoke and limited visibility. Other fires in the West added to an already hazy Idaho and burning restrictions and health advisories were announced.

Potty problems

The SCAT machine at Newland Ranch was disabled when porta-potties with wipes inside were dumped. Wipes jammed up the grinders and clogged the system, forcing other users to find other disposal methods for their full potties. To unclog the machine, someone had to wade in and pull out the wipes that were clogging the system. After experiencing this fun job, North Fork employees began spot-checking porta-potties at Newland Ranch. Several groups were denied use of the SCAT machine due to wipes in their potties.

Indian Creek boat ramp replaced

A new boat ramp was built at the Indian Creek Guard Station in early September. Employees working at Indian Creek, including Diana Yupe, the American Indian Interpreter stationed there, and Dave England, Indian Creek checker, worked throughout the summer to peel these logs in preparation for the ramp; they also improved an old trail to the river for use while the ramp was out of commission.

The cross beams were floated downstream from Boundary Creek by the river patrol, with help from several Middle Fork outfitters. Work on the ramp began on September 1st and was completed on September 7th, thanks to many long hours of hard work by several Forest Service



employees and a crew of volunteers from the Selway-Bitterroot-Frank Church Foundation.

These fine folks also improved the trail to the beach.



Chinook and the Middle Fork

A total of seven chinook salmon redds were identified in the mainstem Middle Fork below Boundary Creek in the fall of 2012. Four were identified by both the river patrol and the research station and an additional three were identified by the research station. The redds identified by the river patrol were marked with flagging. Boaters were provided information about what these redds looked like, were advised as to their locations and asked to avoid them and float past as quietly and quickly as possible. Maps of these redds were posted online, displayed at the launch sites, and emailed to those with reservations. A redd was established just below Big Snag camp, which was closed for the rest of the year to protect the nest.

Early 2013 spring boaters will receive emails identifying these redd locations, and are asked to use care to avoid damage to the incubating eggs until they hatch and emerge from the gravel as fry (baby fish) sometime in February, March, or April.

Guard Stations close for the season

The Boundary Creek office closed on September 15th. Indian Creek Guard Station was closed on October 4th.

River use information

Use figures for the 2012 float season, which stretched from March 23rd through November 20th, show a total of 768 permits were issued for 10,546 people on 5,207 boats. Use figures are posted on our website.

New river camps

River Manager John Haugh, assisted by Archaeologist John Rose and the Middle Fork River Patrol, succeeded in identifying four new river camps for boaters. These are small to medium sized camps that will be available to boaters starting in 2013. Pictures and descriptions will be posted on the web and these camps will be added to the campsite list.

Boaters using these new camps will receive a handout of the camp, which details the camp's location and approach, as these camps are not on any river map.

Volunteer River Ranger Program

Due to a 40% budget reduction, we were faced with eliminating one River Ranger crew. This would have eliminated the 7day per week presence by the River Patrol during the lottery season and the associated work and assistance they provide. However we were able to successfully recruit over 20 volunteers to accompany paid River Rangers and allow 7 day per week coverage by two crews during the lottery season. We would like to continue the program into 2013, but at a reduced level. If interested please contact the district office for more information.

Middle Fork Ranger District

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